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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 002472

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID PREL US ZI

SUBJECT: U.N. DONOR MEETING WITH GOZ MINISTERS OF HEALTH
AND SOCIAL WELFARE

REFS: HARARE 2422

¶1. Summary: On November 6, Ambassador Sullivan and A/USAID Director attended a meeting, hosted and chaired by the U.N. Humanitarian Co-ordinator (HC) to Zimbabwe (J. Victor Angelo), between major donor country representatives and key Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) officials on the worsening humanitarian crisis in the country. The meeting was well attended by Chiefs of Mission and senior representatives of most major donor countries to Zimbabwe. Key GOZ participants included Minister of Labor, Public Works and Social Welfare July Moyo and Minister of Health and Child Welfare Dr. David Parirenyatwa. At the outset, both ministers thanked donor representatives for their countries' assistance to date, discussed the country crisis and response, and concluded with a list of areas of additional need. These initial statements provided little new information, largely reiterating information presented in prior documentation on these subjects. Most of the subsequent questions and answers covered similarly familiar topics, with the ministers' responses also largely echoing past exchanges on these subjects. Meeting highlights included a testy exchange on the "Insiza (World Food Programme (WFP) food seizure) incident" which remains unresolved, and a coerced announcement that the government had agreed to allow Save the Children Federation to resume food assistance activities in Binga and Nyaminyami Districts. At the conclusion, all present concurred that it had been a useful exchange, and agreed to continue to participate in future such meetings on a regular basis. This meeting represents an initial attempt by HC Angelo to promote a more direct dialogue on humanitarian issues between the government and donors. (Angelo clearly took advantage of donor expressions of concern to press the GOZ.) The Mission remains sceptical that this new venue will prove any more effective than past similar U.N.-brokered initiatives at dialogue with the GOZ. However, the Mission will continue to participate, if for no other reason than it provides us with a useful venue to put forth our points to government on the increasingly desperate situation, and our increasingly frustrated efforts to respond to it. End Summary.

¶2. On November 6, Ambassador Sullivan and A/USAID Director attended a meeting, hosted and chaired by the U.N. Humanitarian Co-ordinator to Zimbabwe (J. Victor Angelo), between major donor country representatives and key GOZ officials on the worsening humanitarian crisis in the country. The meeting was the first of a planned series of regular such donor-government meetings, in a new HC initiative to promote a more direct dialogue between the two groups. The meeting was well attended by Chiefs of Mission and senior representatives of most major donor countries to Zimbabwe. GOZ participants included Minister of Labor, Public Works and Social Welfare July Moyo, Minister of Health and Child Welfare Dr. David Parirenyatwa, and associated ministry staff.

¶3. The meeting started with statements by both ministers that thanked donor representatives for their countries' assistance to date, discussed the country crisis and response, and concluded with a list of areas of additional need. These rather lengthy initial statements provided little new information, largely reiterating information presented in prior documentation on these subjects (especially the September Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC) report and the U.N.'s Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for Zimbabwe - see Reftel).

¶4. Most of the subsequent questions and answers (Q&A) covered similarly familiar topics, such as the plight of the ex-commercial farm workers, NGO registration/approval (Germany), politicization of food aid (Sweden, U.S.),

improved program transparency, information-sharing and coordination (especially regarding GOZ/Grain Marketing Board (GMB) food aid and sales activities - Britain, U.S.), and several statements on respective country contributions to date to the humanitarian crisis by the U.S., British and the EU. The ministers' responses to these questions also largely echoed past exchanges on these subjects. Major points of this Q&A included:

- ex-commercial farm workers could not be singled out for special treatment; rather, they must be treated the same as others with "no discrimination" within a given area(GOZ). As long as this principle was adhered to, there would be no problem with assistance to this target group. In this regard, Moyo mentioned the GOZ's current UN-supported effort to survey farm workers nationwide to get a better idea of their numbers, locations, conditions and needs. [Note: A review of the draft Terms of Reference for this survey reveals that the real purpose behind this survey is to determine the status of payment of retrenchment packages for these workers, presumably so that additional pressure can be placed on commercial farmers (and Britain?) to own up to this government-imposed responsibility. End Note.]
- many of the current problems with coordination and purported "politicization" of humanitarian assistance resulted from NGO activities that were not duly approved by central government or implemented through accepted/established local government structures. Hence, all programs must be reviewed and approved by central government, and implemented through established local structures to avoid these problems. Government would continue its best efforts to enlist the support of additional NGOs, who followed these procedures, to assist in the relief effort.
- "politicization of assistance" was an "emotional" and "highly distorted" issue due to the current polarized political environment. Hence, there was a need for prompt reporting and joint investigation of reported incidents to ensure that the facts were ascertained, "false" reports were quickly quashed and appropriate corrective measures could be effected in a timely manner.
- good information and coordination of government programs (especially the GMB) was hampered by various operational constraints, such as unpredictability of supplies, logistical bottlenecks, etc. However, within these constraints, government would endeavour to provide better information on their program operations in the interest of avoiding duplication and maximizing the effectiveness of limited aid resources.
- major new donor commitments noted included the long-awaited arrival of some \$26 million in critical medicines, and the provision of additional equipment and supplies to the country's central blood transfusion unit - both by the EU.

¶5. Meeting highlights included a brief and testy exchange on the "Insiza incident", where approximately 3 MT of WFP food commodities (including some U.S.-donated vegetable oil) were seized by ruling party supporters in several wards in the run-up to the recent Parliamentary by-election in this district. In response to the U.S. Ambassador's query on the status of this issue, following HC Angelo's confirmation that WFP food distributions remained suspended in this district, Minister Moyo indicated the results of his personal investigations into these incidents, characterizing them as "complicated" and unfortunate "errors of judgement." In response to the Ambassador's query on plans for the restitution of the stolen commodities, the Minister stated that it was better not to dwell on restitution (read "retribution") for past mistakes, but rather to move forward with "lessons learned" for avoiding such incidents in the future. It was clear following this exchange that this issue remains unresolved, much to the chagrin of the GOZ and their party supporters within this district. (On the weekend following this meeting, State media claimed that agreement had been reached to resume food deliveries in Insiza, a claim rebutted by HC who told the Ambassador that issues of restitution must be addressed as well as correct acknowledgement by GOZ of the source of the cutoff.)

¶6. Near the end of the meeting, Minister Moyo announced an agreement by all levels of government to allow Save the Children Federation (SCF/UK) to resume food distribution and supplementary feeding activities in Binga and Nyaminyami Districts, following an almost two-month cessation for "political reasons" after the local government elections at end-August. It is significant to note, however, that Minister Moyo only made this welcome announcement under pressure from HC Angelo. The Embassy learned Nov 11 from UN that SCF/UK is re-mobilizing staff now in preparation for the resumption of food distribution and feeding activities on Nov 13. End Note.]

¶7. At the meeting's conclusion, all present concurred that it had been a useful exchange, with a generally constructive ambience, and agreed to continue to participate in future such meetings on a regular basis.

18. Comment: This meeting represents an initial attempt by HC Angelo to promote a more direct dialogue on humanitarian issues between the government and donors. Through this initiative, Angelo seems to be trying to re-engage government/donors at some level through a dialogue on issues surrounding this somewhat less controversial area of bilateral relations, as well as trying to extricate himself from the center of difficult dialogue between government and donors. As a first attempt, the meeting went well, with a reasonable exchange of views on several important subjects. Even the testy exchange on politicization of food assistance was important for the Government to hear. We are not optimistic that this initiative will prove any more effective than past similar U.N.-brokered initiatives at dialogue with the GOZ. However, the Mission will continue to participate to put forth our points to government on the increasingly desperate country situation, and our increasingly frustrated efforts to respond to it.

Sullivan#